MR. KRIS KRINGLE

S. WEIR MITCHELL

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MR·KRIS·KRINGLE

"YES · I · AM · KRIS
KRINGLE · TO-NIGHT

MR. KRIS KRINGLE
A CHRISTMAS TALE

BY
S. WEIR MITCHELL

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY CLYDE O. DE LAND

PHILADELPHIA
GEORGE W. JACOBS & CO.

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DEDICATION

THE·FOLLOWING·LITTLE·CHRISTMAS STORY·WAS·WRITTEN·FOR·THE BENEFIT·OF·THE·HOME·OF·THE MERCIFUL·SAVIOUR·FOR·CRIPPLED CHILDREN, PHILADELPHIA AND IS·DEDICATED

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ILLVSTRATIONS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"Yes, I am Kris Kringle tonight" - - - - - - Frontispiece

She bent over the portrait of a young man - - - Facing page 48

"I have come far, very far, to see you" - - - Facing page 68

He had found a great mine of gold - - - - - Facing page 80

"O Alice, Mr. Khwis is kissing mamma" - - - Facing page 104

FOREWORD

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MANY years ago a woman left childless, on whom also had fallen a great sorrow, turned for relief toward helping a crippled child. It proved difficult to find for him a home where his wants and limitations would be patiently considered. It seemed as easy to care for many as for one, and so a small house was taken and thus this little seed-

thought of desire to help one lonely waif grew into a noble charity. It has seemed like a natural growth, and as to a great tree of shade and shelter come rain and sunshine to refresh, so to this has come unasked for now twenty-one years all manner of helpful aid. A want is discovered and shortly appears some one to whom this silent appeal proves irresistible. People came and were pleased

at the organized happiness they saw. So one offered this building or that, and money came, year after year. This is like no other institution. There are no managers, no officials. One kindly busy presence is the ruling heart and mind. To her aid come as needed women whose names I no more know than I do those of any others of the unseen angels of mercy.

It is a Home for the Crippled, and really a home. There is love and hope and play and little trades and a permanent rest for those who cannot work; a household with entire absence of severe discipline, a family of the inapt, the broken in body, about whom is an atmosphere of provident, indulgent tenderness.

Many years ago I wrote to help this

wonderful charity the story which, reprinted and freshly illustrated, again seeks the approval of the public. Every copy bought is a contribution, to some degree, to the Home for Crippled Children.

But after you have read this little story, and of the pleasant ending, and of the two happy children, let me ask of you to think of those little ones,

whom the Home guards and helps, and to give, if but a trifle, to assist those who, more modest than I, ask of no one what is continually needed—money; and pray think what a fairy tale it is and of what becomes of your little dime, your little bank note, your big cheque. It somehow disappears in a bank and suddenly it has changed and is become peace and hope and happiness and food for

the hungry and clothes and a home with security of such joys and tender helping as least of all the crippled child should miss.

Your money has passed through the hands of a good woman and behold, it is thanks, it is peace, it is prayer.

S. WEIR MITCHELL.

MR·KRIS·KRINGLE

MR·KRIS·KRINGLE

IT was Christmas Eve. The snow had clad the rolling hills in white, as if in preparation for the sacred morrow. The winds, boisterous all day long, at fall of night ceased to roar amidst the naked forest, and now the silent industry of the falling flakes

made of pine and spruce tall white tents. At last, as the darkness grew, a deepening stillness came on hill and valley, and all nature seemed to wait expectant of the coming of the Christmas time.

Above the broad river a long, gray stone house lay quiet amid the softly-falling snow, showing no sign of light or life except in a feeble, red glow through the Venetian blinds of the many

windows of one large room. Within, a huge fire of mighty logs lit up with distinctness only the middle space and fell with variable illumination on a silent group about the hearth.

On one side a mother sat with her cheek upon her hand, her elbow on the table, gazing steadily into the fire; on the other side were two children, a girl and a boy; he on a cushion, she in a low chair. Some half-felt sadness re-

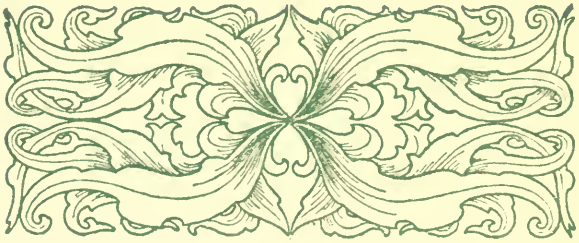
pressed for these little ones the gay Christmas humor of the hopeful hour, commonly so full for them of anticipative joy.

Now and then the boy looked across the room, pleased when the leaping flames sent flaring over floor and wall long shadows from the tall brass andirons or claw-footed chair and table. Sometimes he glanced shyly at the mother, but getting no answering smile

kept silence. Once or twice the girl whispered a word to him, as the logs fell and a sheet of flame from the hickory and the quick-burning birch set free the stored-up sunshine of many a summer day. A moment later, the girl caught his arm.

"Oh! hear the ice, Hugh," she cried, for mysterious noises came up from the river and died away.

"Yes, it is the ice, dear," said the



mother. As she spoke she struck a match and lighted two candles which stood on the table beside her.

For a few minutes as she stood her gaze wandered along the walls over the portraits of men and women once famous in Colonial days. The great china bowls, set high for safety on top of the book-cases, the tankards, and the tall candelabra troubled her with memories of

more prosperous times. The emotions and bitterness of a disappointed life, however, had left neither on brow nor on cheek the usual signals of disaster. A glance distinctly tender and distinctly proud made sweet her grave and beautiful face as for a moment she turned to look upon the children.

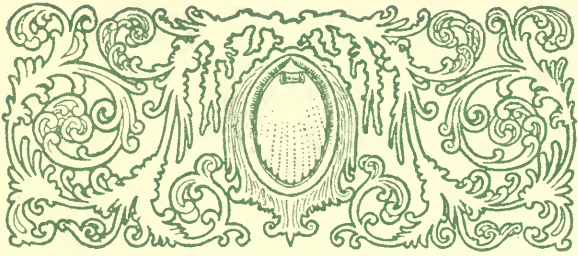
The little fellow on the cushion at her feet looked up.

"Mamma, we do want to know why Christmas comes only once a year."

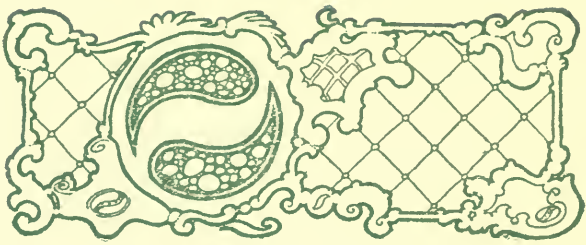
"Hush, dear, I cannot talk to you now; not to-night; not at all, to-night."

"But was not Christ always born?" he persisted.

"Yes, yes," she replied. "But I cannot talk to you now. Be quiet a little while. I have something to do," and so saying, as she sat down, she drew to her side a basket of old letters.



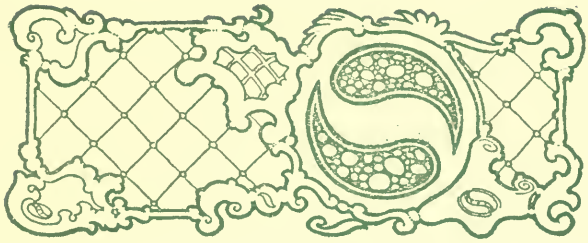
The children remained silent, or made little signs to each other as they watched the fire. Meanwhile the mother considered the papers, now with a gleam of anger in her eyes, as she read, and now with a momentary blur of tear-dimmed vision. Most of the letters she threw at once on the fire. They writhed a moment like living creatures, and of a sudden blazed out as if tormented into sudden confession of the passions of



years gone by; then they fell away to black unmemoried things, curling crumpled in the heat.

The children saw them burn with simple interest in each new conflagration. Something in the mother's ways quieted them, and they became intuitively conscious of sadness in the hour and the task. At last the boy grew uneasy at the long repose of tongue.

"O Alice! see the red sparks going



about," he said, looking at the wandering points of light in the blackening scrolls of shrivelled paper.

"Nurse says those are people going to church," said his sister authoritatively.

Her mother looked up, smiling. "Ah, that is what they used to tell me when I was little."

"They're fire-flies," said the boy, "like in a vewy dark night." Now and then

his r's troubled him a little, and conscious of his difficulty, he spoke at times with oddly serious deliberation.

"You really must keep quiet," said the mother. "Now, do keep still, or you will have to go to bed," and so saying she turned anew to the basket.

Presently the girl exclaimed, "Why do you burn the letters?" She had some of her mother's persistency, and was not readily controlled. This time

the mother made no reply. A sharp spasm of pain went over her features. Looking into the fire, as if altogether unconscious of the quick-witted spies at her side, she said aloud, "Oh! I can read no more! Let them wait. What a fool I was. What a fool!" and abruptly pushed the basket aside.

The little fellow leaped up and cast his arms about her while his long, yellow hair fell on her neck and shoulder.

"O Mamma!" he cried, "don't read any more. Let *me* burn them. I hate them to hurt you."

She smiled on him through tears—rare things for her. "Every one must bear his own troubles, Hugh. You couldn't help me. You couldn't know, dear, what to burn."

"But I know," said the girl, decisively. "I know. I had a letter once; but Hugh never had a letter. I wish

Kris Kringle would take them away this very, very night; and lessons, too, I do. What will he bring us for Christmas, mamma? I know what I want—"

"A Kris Kringle to take away troubles would suit me well, Alice; I could hang up a big stocking."

"And I know what I want," said the boy. "Nurse says Kris has no money this Christmas. I don't care." But the great blue eyes filled as he spoke.

The mother rose. "There will be no presents this year, Hugh. Only—only more love from me, from one another; and you must be brave and help me, because you know this is not the worst of it. We are to go away next week, and must live in the town. You see, dears, it can't be helped."

"Yes," said Hugh, thoughtfully, "it can't be helped, Alice."

"I don't want to go," said the girl.

"Hush," said Hugh.

"And I do want a doll."

"I told you to be quiet, Alice," returned her mother, a rising note of anger in her voice. In fact, she was close upon a burst of tears, but the emotions are all near of kin and linked in mystery of relationship. Pity and love for the moment became unreasoning

wrath. "You are disobedient," she continued.

"O mamma! we are vewy sorry," said the lad, who had been the less offending culprit.

"Well, well. No matter. It is bedtime, children. Now to bed, and no more nonsense. I can't have it. I can't bear it."

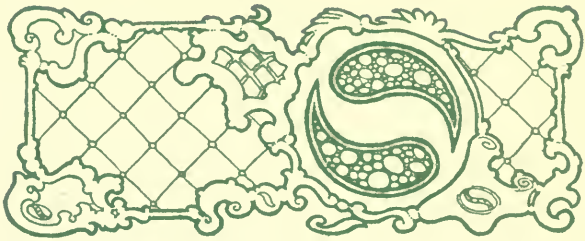
The children rose submissively, and, kissing her, were just leaving the room,

when she said: "Oh! but we must not lose our manners. You forget."

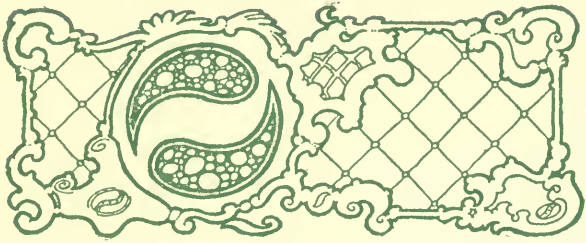
The girl, pausing near the doorway, dropped a courtesy.

"That wasn't very well done, Alice. Ah! that was better."

The little fellow made a bow quite worthy of the days of minuet and hoops, and then, running back, kissed the tall mother with a certain passionate tenderness, saying softly, "Now, don't you



cry when we are gone, dear, dear mamma;" then, in a whisper, "I will pway God not to let you cwy," and so Hugh fled away, leaving her still perilously close to tears. Very soon, up-stairs, the old nurse, troubled by the children's disappointment, was assuring them with eager mendacity that Kris would be certain to make his usual visit, while down-stairs the mother walked slowly to and fro. She had that miserable gift, an



unfailing memory of anniversaries, and now, despite herself, the long years rolled back upon her, so that under the sad power of their recurrent memories she seemed a helpless prey.

While the children were yet too young to recognize their loss the great calamity of her life had come. Then by degrees the wreck of her fortune had gone to pieces, and now at last the old home of her own people, deeply mortgaged,

was about to pass from her forever. Much that was humbling had fallen to her in life, but nothing as sore as this final disaster. At length she rose, took a lighted candle from the table, and walked slowly around the great library. The sombre bindings of the books that her childhood knew called back dim recollections. The great china bowls, the tall silver tankards, the shining sconces, and, above all, the Stuart por-

traits and the Copleys of men who had shone in Colonial days and helped to make a more than imperial nation, each and all, disturbed her as she gazed. At last she returned to the fireside, sat down and began anew her unfinished task. With hasty hands she tumbled over the letters and at length came upon a package tied with a faded ribbon; one of those thin orange-colored silk bands with which cigars are tied in bundles.

She threw it aside with a quick movement of disdain and opened the case of a miniature slowly and with deliberate care. A letter fell upon her lap as she bent over the portrait of a young man. The day, the time, the need to dispose of accumulated letters, had brought her to this which she meant to be a final settlement of one of life's grim accounts. For awhile she steadily regarded the relics of happier hours. Then, throwing

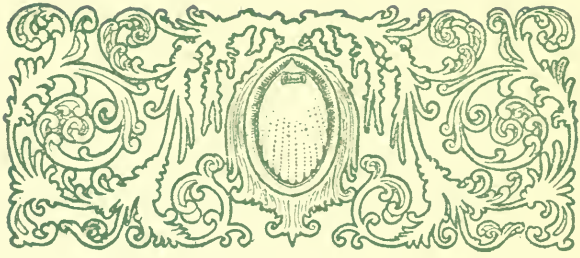
SHE·BENT·OVER·
THE·PORTRAIT·OF·A·
YOVNG·MAN·

herself back in her chair, she cried aloud, "How long I hoped; how hopeless was my hope, and he said, he said I was cruel and hard. That I loved him no more. Oh! that was a lie! a bitter lie! But how could I watch my children grow up to see what I saw, and learn to bear what I have borne. No! no! a thousand times no! I chose between two duties, and I was right. I was the man of the two, and I sent him away

—forever. He said,—yes, I was right; but, my God! how cruel is life! I would never have gone, never! never! There!" she exclaimed, and closing the miniature with violence, threw it back into the basket, as one may shut an unpleasant book read and done with.

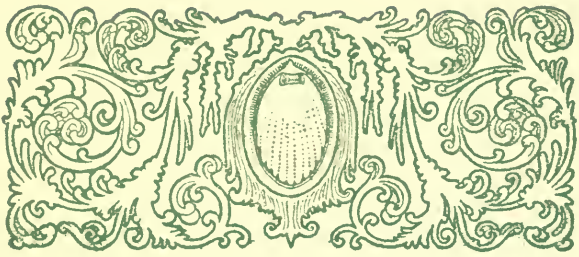
For a moment, and with firmer face, she considered the letter, reading scraps of it aloud, as if testing her resolution to

make an end of it all. "Hard, was I? Yes. Would I had been hard sooner. My children would have been better off. He wrote, 'I went because you bade me go.' Yes, I did. Will he ever know what that cost me? 'I shall never come again until you bid me come.' Not in this world, then," she cried. "O Hugh! Hugh!" And in a passion of tears that told of a too great trial, but still resolute



despite her partial defeat, she tore the letter and cast it on the fire. "There!" she cried, "would to God I loved him less." Then, with strange firmness, she took up a book and sternly set herself to comprehend what she read.

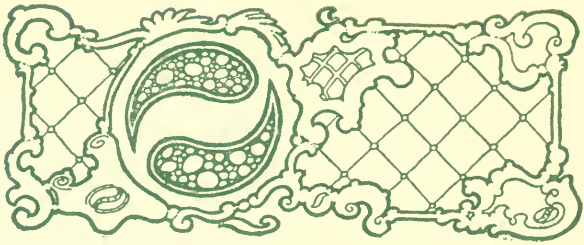
The hours went by and at last she rose wearily, put out one candle, raked ashes over the embers, and taking the other light, went slowly up to bed. She paused a moment at the nursery door



where she heard voices. "What! awake still," she cried.

"We was only talking about Khwis," said the small boy. "We won't any more, will we, Alice? She thinks he won't come, but I think he will come because we are both so good all to-day."

"No, no, he will not come this Christmas, my darlings. Go to sleep. Go to sleep," and with too full a heart she turned away.



But the usual tranquil slumber of childhood was not Hugh's, at least. The fact that they were soon to leave their home troubled the imaginative little man. Then, too, a great wind began to sweep over the hills and to shake the snow-laden pines. On its way, it carried afresh from the ice of the river wild sounds of disturbance and at length in the mid hours of night, an avalanche of snow slid from the roof. Hugh sat up; he

realized well enough what had happened. But presently the quick ear of childhood was aware of other and less familiar sounds. Was it Kris Kringle? Oh! if he could only see him once! He touched the sister asleep in her bed near by, and at last shook her gently.

"What is it, Hugh?" she said.

"I hear Khwis. I know it is Khwis!"

"O Hugh! I hear, too, but it might be a robber."

"No, nevah on Chwistmas Eve. It couldn't be a wobber. It is Khwis. I mean to go and see. I hear him outside. You know, Alice, there is nevah, nevah any wickedness on Chwistmas Eve."

"But if it is a robber he might take you away."

"Oh! wobbers steal girls, but they nevah, nevah steal boys, and you needn't go."

"But are you sure? Oh! do listen," she added. Both heard the creaking noise of footsteps in the dry snow.

"I will look—I must look," cried Hugh, slipping from his bed. In a moment he had raised the sash and was looking out into the night. The sounds he had heard ceased. He could see no one. "He has gone, Alice." Then he cried, "Mr. Khwis Kwingle, are you there? or is you a wobber?" As he

spoke a cloaked man came from behind a great pine and stood amid the thickly-falling flakes.

"Why, that is Hugh," he said. "Hugh!"

"He does know my name," whispered the lad to the small counsellor now at his side.

"And, of course, I am Kris Kringle. And I have a bag full of presents. But come softly down and let me in, and

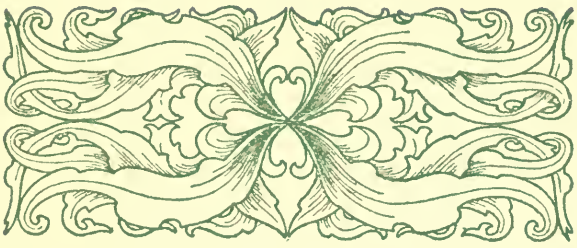
don't make a noise or away I go; and bring Alice."

The girl was still in doubt, but her desire for the promised gifts was strong, and in the very blood of the boy was the spirit of daring adventure. There was a moment of whispered indecision, resulting in two bits of conclusive wisdom.

Said Alice, "If we go together, Hugh, and he takes one, the other can squeal. Oh! very loud like a bear—a *big* bear."

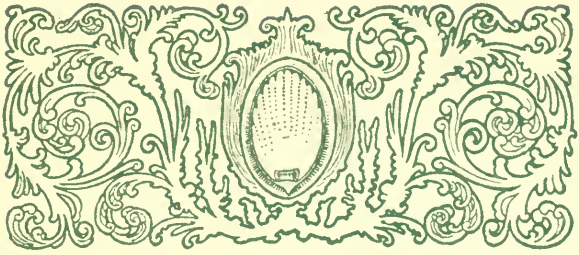
"And," said Hugh, "I will get my gweat gwandpapa's sword." And with this he got upon a chair and by the failing light of the nursery fire carefully took down from over the chimney the dress rapier which had figured at peaceful levees of other days. "Now," he said, "if you are afwaid I will go all alone myself."

"I am dreadfully afraid," said she,



"but I will go, too." So she hastily drew on a little white wrapper and her slippers and he his well-worn brown velvet knickerbocker trousers. Neither had ever known a being they had reason to fear, and so, with beating hearts, but brave enough, they stole quietly out in their sweet innocence and hand in hand went down the dark staircase, still hearing faint noises as they felt their way.

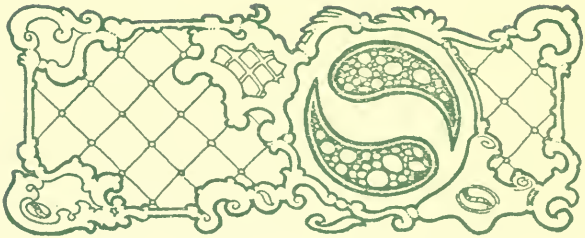
They crossed the great warm library and entered the hall, where, with much effort, they unlocked the door and lifted the old-fashioned bar which guarded it. The cold air swept in, and before them was a tall man in a cloak half white with snow. He said at once, "Oh! Hugh! Alice! Pleasant Christmas to you. Let us get in out of the cold; but carefully —carefully, no sound!" As he spoke he shut the door behind him. "Come,"



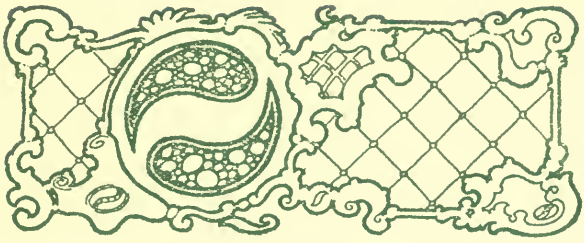
he said, and seeming to know the way, went before them into the library.

"Oh! I'm so frightened," said Alice to Hugh in a whisper. "I wish I was in bed."

Not so the boy. The man pushed away the ashes from the smouldering logs, and took from the wood basket a quantity of birch bark and great cones of the pine. As he cast them on the quick embers a fierce red blaze went up,



and the room was all alight. And now he turned quickly, for Hugh, of a mind to settle the matter, was standing on guard between him and the door to the stairway, which they had left open when they came down. The man smiled as he saw the lad push his sister back and come a step or two forward. He made a pretty picture in his white shirt, brown knee-breeches, and little bare legs, the yellow locks about his shoulders, the



rapier in his hand, as he stood alert and quite fearless.

"My sister thinks perhaps you are a wobber, sir; but I think you are Mr. Khwis Kwingle."

"Yes, I am Kris Kringle to-night, and you see I know your names—Alice, Hugh." His cloak fell from him, and he stood smiling, a handsome Kris. "Do not be afraid. Be sure I love little children. Come, let us talk a bit."

"It's all wite, Alice," said the boy. "I said he wasn't a wobber."

And now quite at ease they went hand in hand toward the brilliant blaze of the fire. The man leaned heavily upon a chair back, his lips moving, a great stir of emotion shaking him as he gazed on the little ones.

"Well, you see, my children, that I am really Kris Kringle," and then, with much amusement, "but what do you

mean to do with your sword, my little man?"

"It was to kill the wobber, sir; but you musn't be afraid, because you're not a wobber."

"An' he really won't hurt you," added Alice.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Kris, smiling, "you're a gallant little gentleman. And you have been—are you always a good boy to—your mother?"

"I has been a vewy good boy." Then his conscience entered a protest, and he added: "for two whole days. I'll go and ask mamma to come and tell you."

"No, no," said Kris. "It is only children that can see me. Old folks couldn't see me."

"My mother is vewy young."

"Oh! but not like a child; not like you."

"Please, sir, to let us see the presents,"

"I·HAVE·COME·FAR··
VERY·FAR··TO·SEE
YOV"

said Alice, much at her ease. For now he pushed a great chair to the fire, and seated them both in it, saying: "Ah! the poor little cold toes." Then he carefully closed the door they had left open, and said, smiling as he sat down, "I have come far—very far—to see you."

"Has you come far to-night?" said the little host, with rising courage.

"No, not far to-night." Then he paused. "Is—is your mother—well?"

"Yes," said Hugh, "she is vewy well, and we are much obliged."

"May we soon see the presents?" said Alice. "They did say you would not come to-night because we are poor now."

"And," added Hugh, "my pony is sold to a man, and his tail is vewy long, and he loves sugar—the pony, I mean; and mamma says we must go away and live in the town."

"Yes, yes," said Kris. "I know."

"He knows," said Hugh, nodding his head decisively.

"Oh! they know everything in fairy-land," said Alice.

"Was you evah in faywyland, sir?" asked Hugh.

"Yes."

"Where 'bouts is it, sir, and please how is it bounded on the north? And

what are the pwincipal wivers? We might look for it on the map if you will tell us where it is."

"It is in the Black Hills."

"Oh! the Black Hills," said Alice. "I know."

"Yes, but you're not sleepy? Not a bit sleepy?"

"No, no."

"Then before the pretty things hop out of my bag let me tell you a story,"

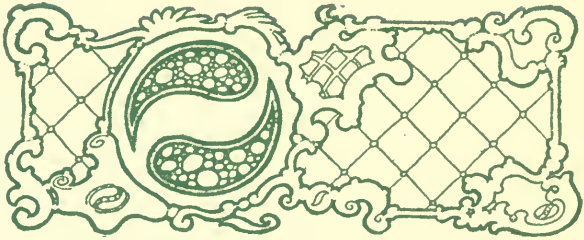
and he smiled at his desire to lengthen a delicious hour.

"I should like that."

"And I hope it won't be very, very long," said Alice, intent on more sordid things.

"That's the way with girls, Mr. Kwingle; they can't wait."

"Ah, well, well. Once on a time there was a bad boy, and he was very naughty, and no one loved him because



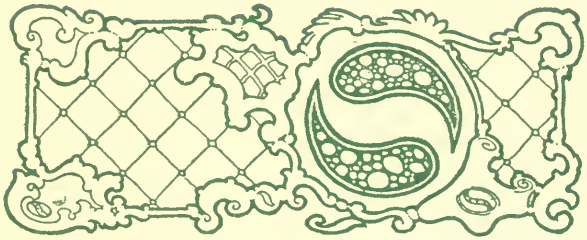
he spent love like money till it was all gone. When he found he had no more love given him, he went away, and away, to a far country."

"Like the man in the Bible," said Hugh, promptly. "The—the—what's his name, Alice?"

"The prodigal son," said Kris, "you mean—"

"Yes, sir. The pwodigal son."

"Yes, like the prodigal son."



"Well, at last he came to the Black Hills, and there he lived with other rough men."

"But you did say he was a boy," said Alice, accurately critical.

"He was gwowed up, Alice. Don't you int— inter—"

"Interrupt, you goosey," said Alice, a trifle impatiently.

"One Christmas Eve these men fell to talking of their homes, and made up

their minds to have a good dinner. But Hugh—"

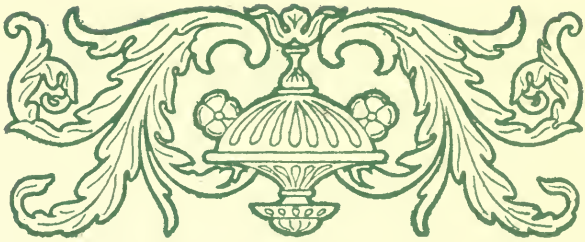
"Oh!" exclaimed the lad, "Hugh! was that his name?"

Mr. Kris nodded and continued. "But Hugh felt very weak because he was just getting well of a fever, yet they persuaded him to come to table with the rest. One man, a German, stood up and said, 'This is the eve of Christmas. I will say our grace, what we say at home.'

One man laughed, but the others were still. Then the German said,

'Come, Lord Christ, and be our guest,
Take with us what Thou hast blest.'

When Hugh heard the German he began to think of home and of many Christmas Eves, and because he felt a strangeness in his head, he said, 'I'm not well; I will go into the air.' As he moved, he saw before him a man in the door-



way. The face of the man was sad, and his garment was white as snow. He said, 'Follow me.' But no others, except Hugh, saw or heard. Now, when Hugh went outside, the man he had seen was gone; but being still confused, Hugh went over the hard snow and among trees, not knowing what he did; and at last after wandering a long time he came to a steep hillside. Here he slipped and rolling down fell over a

high place. Down, down, down he fell, and he fell—"

"Oh! make him stop," cried little Hugh, excitedly clasping his hands. "I do want him to stop."

"He fell upon a deep bed of soft snow and was not hurt, but soon got up, and thought he was buried in a white tomb. Presently he understood and his head grew clearer and he beat the snow away and got out. Then, first he said a prayer,

and that was the only prayer he had said in a long time."

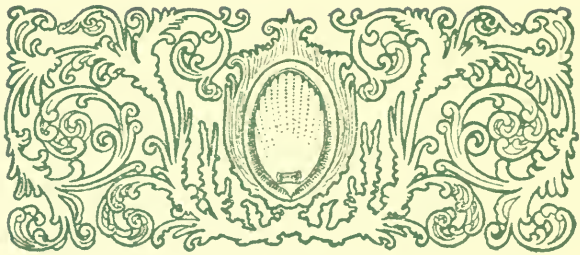
"Oh my!" exclaimed little Hugh. "I did think people could nevah sleep unless they say their prayers. That's what nurse says. Doesn't she, Alice?"

And just here Kris had to wipe his eyes, but he took the little fellow's hand in his and went on.

"Soon he found shelter under a cliff,

HE·HAD·FOUND
A·GREAT·MINE·OF
GOLD
CLYDE·O·DE·LAND

where no snow was, and with his flint and steel struck a light, and made with sticks and logs a big fire. After this he felt warm and better all over and fell asleep. When he woke up it was early morning, and looking about, he saw in the rock little yellow streaks and small lumps, and then he knew he had found a great mine of gold no man had ever seen before. By and by he got out of



the valley and found his companions, and in the spring he went to his mine, which, because he had found it, was all his own, and he got people to work there and dig out the gold. After that he was no longer poor, but very, very rich."

"And was he good then?" said Hugh.

"And did he go home," said Alice, "and buy things?"

"Yes, he went. One night he went home and saw his house and little chil-

dren, and—but he will not stay, because there is no love waiting in his house, and all the money in the world is no good unless there is some love too. You see, dear, a house is just a house of brick and mortar, but when it is full of love, then it is a home."

"I like that man," said Hugh. "Tell me more."

"But first," said Alice, "oh! we do want to see our presents."

"Ah, well. That is all, I think; and the presents. Now for the presents." Then he opened a bag and took out first a string of great pearls, and said, as he hung them around Alice's neck, "There, these the oysters made for you years ago under the deep blue sea. They are for a wedding gift from Kris. They are too fine for a little maid. No Queen has prettier pearls. But when you are married and some one you love vexes you or

is unkind, look at these pearls, and forgive, oh! a hundred times over; twice, thrice, for every pearl, because Kris said it. You won't understand now, but some day you will."

"Yes, sir," said Alice, puzzled, and playing with the pearls.

Said Hugh, "You said, Mr. Khwis, that the oysters make pearls. Why do the oysters make pearls?"

"I will tell you," replied Kris. "If a

bit of something rough or sharp gets inside the oyster's house, and it can't be got rid of, the oyster begins to make a pearl of it, and covers it over and over until the rough, rude thing is one of these beautiful pearls."

"I see," said Hugh.

"That is a little fairy tale I made for myself; I often make stories for myself."

"That must be very nice, Mr. Khwis.

How nice it must be for your little children every night when you tell them stories."

"Yes—yes"—and here Kris had to wipe his eyes with his handkerchief.

"Isn't that a doll?" Alice asked, looking at the bag.

"Yes; a doll from Japan."

"Oh!" exclaimed Alice.

"And boxes of sugar-plums for Christmas," he added. "And, Hugh, here are

skates for you and this bundle of books."

"Thank you, sir."

"And these—and these for my—for Alice," and Kris drew forth a half-dozen delicate Eastern scarves and cast them, laughing, around the girl's neck as she stood delighted.

"And now I want to trust you. This is for—for your mother; only an envelope from Kris to her. Inside is a

fairy paper, and whenever she pleases it will turn to gold—oh! much gold, and she will be able then to keep her old home and you need never go away, and the pony will stay."

"Oh! that will be nice. We do sank you, sir; don't we, Alice?"

"Yes. But now I must go. Kiss me. You *will* kiss me?" He seemed to doubt it.

"Oh! yes," they cried, and cast their

little arms about him while he held them in a long embrace, loath to let them go.

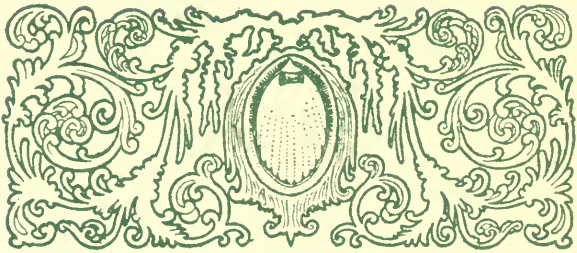
"O Alice!" said Hugh, "Mr. Khwis is cwying. What's the matter, Mr. Khwis?"

"Nothing," he said. "Once I had two little children, and you see you look like them, and—I have not seen them this long while."

Alice silently reflected on the number of presents which Kris's children must have, but Hugh said:

"We are bofe vewy sorry for you, Mr. Khwis."

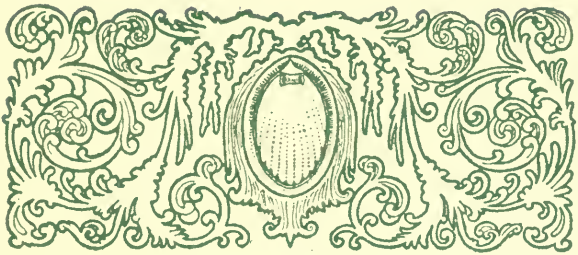
"Thank you," he returned, "I shall remember that; and now be still a little. I must write to your mother, and you must give her my letter after she has my present."



"Yes," said Alice, "we will as soon as we wake up in the morning."

Then Kris lit a candle and took paper and pen from the table, and as they sat quietly waiting, full of the marvel of this famous adventure, he wrote busily, now and then pausing to smile on them, until he closed and gave the letter to the boy.

"Be careful of these things," he said, "for now I must go."

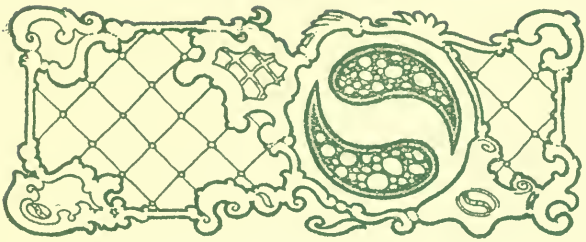


"And will you nevah, nevah come back?"

"My God!" cried the man. "Never —perhaps never. Don't forget me, Alice, Hugh." And this time he kissed them again and went by and opened the door to the stairway.

"We thank you ever so much," said Hugh, and standing aside he waited for Alice to pass, having in his child-like ways something of the grave courtesy of

the ancestors who looked down on him from the walls. Alice courtesied and the small cavalier, still with the old rapier in hand, bowed low. Kris stood at the door and listened to the patter of little feet upon the stairs; then he closed it with noiseless care. In a few minutes he had put out the candles, resumed his cloak and left the house. The snow no longer fell. The waning night was clearer and to eastward a faint rosy



gleam foretold the coming of the sun of Christmas. Kris glanced up at the long-windowed house and turning went slowly down the garden path.

Long before their usual hour of rising, the children burst into the mother's room. "You monkeys," she cried, smiling; "Merry Christmas to you! What is the matter?"

"Oh! he was here! he did come!" cried Alice.

"Khwis was here," said Hugh. "I did hear him in the night, and I told Alice it was Khwis, and she said it was a wobber, and I said it wasn't a wobber. And we went to see and it was a man. It was Khwis. He did say so."

"What! a man at night in the house! Are you crazy, children?"

"And Hugh took grandpapa's sword, and—"

"Gweat-gwanpapa's," said Hugh, with strict accuracy.

"You brave boy!" cried the woman, proudly. "And he stole nothing, and, oh! what a silly tale."

"But it *was* Khwis, mamma. He did give us things. I do tell you it was Khwis Kwingle."

"Oh! he gave us things for you, and for me, and for Hugh, and he gave me this," cried Alice, who had kept her

hand behind her, and now threw the royal pearls on the bed amid a glory of Eastern scarves.

"Are we all bewitched?" cried the mother.

"Oh! and skates and sugar-plums and books and a doll and this for you. Oh! Khwis didn't forget nobody, mamma."

The mother seized and hastily opened the blank envelope which the boy gave her.

"What! what!" she cried, as she stared at the inclosure; "is this a jest?"

Union Trust Co., New York.

Madame:—We have the honor to hold at your disposal the following registered United States bonds, in all amounting to ———."

The sum was a great fortune. The Trust Company was known to her, even its president's signature.

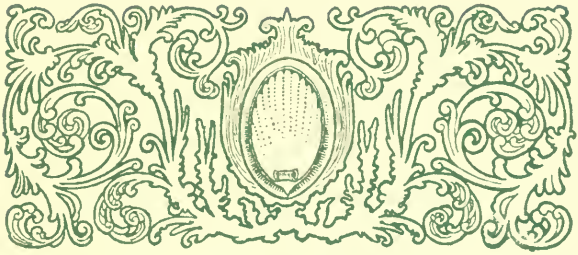
"What's the matter, mamma," cried Alice, amazed at the unusual look the calm mother's face wore as she arose from the bed, while the great pearls tumbled over and lay on the sunlit floor, and the fairy letter fell unheeded. Her thoughts were away in the desert of her past life.

"And here, I forgot," said Hugh, "Mr. Khwis did write you a letter."

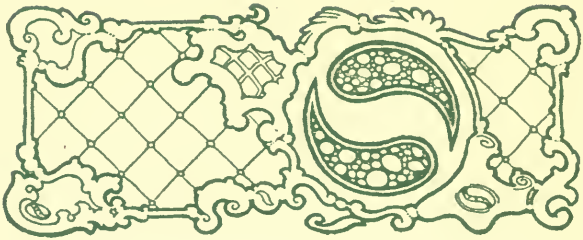
"Quick," she cried. "Give it to me." She opened it with fierce eagerness. Then she said, "Go away, leave me alone. Yes, yes, I will talk to you by and by. Go now." And she drove the astonished children from the room and sat down with her letter.

"Dear Alice:—Shall I say wife? I promised to come no more until you

asked me to come. I can stand it no longer. I came only meaning to see the dear home, and to leave you and my dear children a remembrance. If in those dark days the mother care and fear instinctively set aside what little love was left for me I do not now wonder. Was it well, or ill, what you did when you bade me go? In God's good time I have learned to think it well. That hour is to me like a blurred dream.



To-day I can bless the anger and the sense of duty to our children which drove me forth—too debased a thing to realize my loss. I have won again my self-control, and thank God! am a man once more. You have, you have always had, my love. You have to-day a dozen times the fortune I meanly squandered. I shall never touch it; it is yours and your children's. And, now, Alice, is all love dead for me? And is it Yes or No?



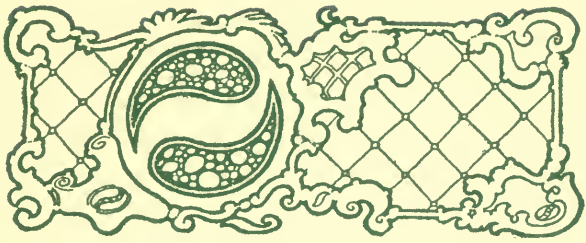
And shall I be always to my little ones Kris, and only a mysterious memory, or shall I be once more

Your Hugh?

"A letter to the bank will find me."

As she read the quick tears came aflood. She turned to her desk and wrote in tremulous haste, "Come, come at once," and ringing for the maid, sent

"O·ALICE! MR·KHWIS·IS·
·KISSING·MAMMA"



it off to the address he gave. The next morning she dressed with unusual care. At the sound of the whistle of the train she went down to the door. Presently, a strong, erect, eager man came swiftly up the pathway. She was in his arms a minute after, little Hugh exclaiming, "O Alice! Mr. Khwis is kissing mamma!"

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